

## Adolescents

Building an array of services for adolescents requires a commitment to look at service needs in both a large context so that the service array is comprehensive, and in a microcosm that allows for individual planning around the specific needs of the individual adolescent. Safe and healthy children, connected to family(ies) and community, moving successfully into young adulthood is our outcome.

While the needs of adolescents certainly fall within the goals of the aforementioned section of Child Well-Being, our vision is to place a distinct focus on this particular group of children because they have specialized needs. These needs can be some of the most difficult to resource. For those adolescents in out-of-home placement, the developmental transition into adulthood can be a time of great disruption and can create a lot of turmoil for a youth/young adult. Additionally, current data shows outcomes for youth of color as they age out of the foster care system that are troublesome, both in Washington and on a national level. Our challenge is to find ways to serve these youth and have access to an array of services that are directly responsive to the needs of these youth, both those in foster care and those remaining at home. While we are fortunate to have the current Family Rehabilitation Services (FRS) program, it needs to be strengthened as we enhance and build on the existing service array.

Our vision is to build a bridge for adolescents, a bridge that will assist them in moving into adulthood successfully, with positive outcomes: strong support systems, community ties, family and kin relationships that are intact, educational attainment, employment, and good physical and mental health. Building this bridge is going to be complex and require an array of resources. It will take the best thinking of not only those in the public child welfare system, but certainly from our partners in the community and resources from programs and foundations across the country that have worked to grow positive outcomes for youth emancipating from their parents or from out-of-home care.

Our specific challenge in this area is delivering assistance to this group through both in-home and out-of-home services. Major strategies we will use to meet these challenges and our goals for serving adolescents include:

- Maintaining youth in the child welfare system until they turn 21. This strategy will assume that youth will need services and placement, unless they choose to opt out of the service. It is anticipated that while they are in out-of-home care, they will be pursuing an educational or vocational goal.

- Revise Independent Living Services to better prepare and support youth through their transition to adulthood, with emphasis on building bridges for youth of color in their home and tribal communities.
- Creating opportunities to build partnerships in the community that will impact better educational outcomes for transitioning youth. Partnering with schools, both public and private educational institutions and creative agency efforts to keep youth in the educational stream is our goal. We also plan to find ways to create and sustain mentoring and tutoring programs that are responsive to the needs of youth to meet their educational and vocational goals and move them ahead on their desired education, employment, and career plans.
- Increasing the focus on achieving permanence for adolescents by developing this array of services, developing tools and processes to do more focused and individualized planning for youth (i.e. using “no wrong door” staffings and other specialized meetings to prepare youth for emancipation), and by keeping a focus on the need to be creative in building permanence into every individual plan for an adolescent.
- Continuing the work of the interagency workgroup that is developing a DSHS adolescent service model. We are anticipating that our strategy will import the work of these experts who have been thinking about, developing and are close to publishing their model of services within DSHS for this group of youth.
- Establishing (or re-establishing) a Youth Advisory Committee and conferences for youth. This will build opportunities for youth support and mentoring and give them voice in the process of service delivery and how we should be looking at and constructing this bridge of services to best meet their needs.
- Providing much-needed reconciliation services for youth to assist them with strengthening, re-establishing, or resolving their relationships (or the loss of those relationships) with their birth family members, kin, and community.

A measure of success for this group will be the availability of an array of services, the bridge, which will give them both roots and wings.